

been a member was fifty-five (55) years, Mr. Martin H. Boyé, who was elected January 17, 1840, being still alive. The next longest term was that of Prof. E. Otis Kendall, LL.D., who was elected January 21, 1842, or fifty-three years previous. Our President, Hon. Frederick Fraley, LL.D., was elected July 15, 1842, and had lived for fifty-two and one-half years. The average length of membership of the living members on that date was sixteen and one-half years (16.05), but this count includes only the American members, of whom there were three hundred and thirty-seven (337).

While to a certain extent the average health may be improving, it will take long periods of time for the predictions of physicians to falsify the mortality tables. In this connection it might be well to note that the records of the Board of Health of Philadelphia show that, one year with another, while improved sanitary conditions modify the fatality of certain zymotic diseases, the death rate in Philadelphia remains practically stationary and at about two per cent.

THE SURVIVAL OF THE MEDIÆVAL ART OF ILLUMINATIVE WRITING AMONG PENNSYLVANIA GERMANS.

BY HENRY C. MERCER.

(Read September 17, 1897).

The notion of a novel collection was suggested to me by a visit paid last April to the house of an individual who has long been in the habit of buying "penny lots" of so-called trash at country sales. There, scattered in confusion about the premises, rusting, warping and crumbling, lay a heterogeneous mass of objects of wood or iron, which by degrees I recognized as of historic value. Forgotten by the antiquary, overlooked by the historian, they were the superannuated and cast-away tools of the Pennsylvanian pioneer. Because they illustrated, with the fidelity of visual facts, the felling of the forest, the building of the log cabin, cooking in the open fire and the disused arts and crafts, professions and amusements of colonial times, I gathered them together and, ransacking Bucks county for other specimens, stored them by the wagon-load in the museum of the Bucks County Historical Society, at

Doylestown, as a novel and hitherto unattempted illustration of the American beginning.

Among the manifold suggestions involved in the genealogy of such objects as the reaper's cradle, the American carpenter's hatchet and pitching axe, the Dutch scythe and the wooden plow, carrying investigation from America to various parts of Europe, a rude, lidless paint-box, fastened with wooden pegs, long puzzled us.

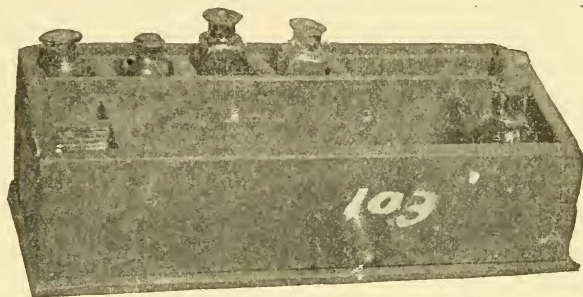


FIG. 1. Paint box used by German schoolmaster about 1820 in the execution of Fraktur or illuminative German handwriting. Museum, No. 103, Bucks County Historical Society. Presented to the Society by Tobias Nash, of Womansville.

About a foot long by six inches broad, with several compartments containing little glass bottles, it was finally explained as one of the color-boxes of teachers of the German schools, superseded in Bucks county fifty years ago. Using it as a receptacle for their home-made pens, brushes and colors, they had instructed scholars in the art of Fraktur or illuminative handwriting until about the year 1840.

With great interest, we learned that the time-stained box found in one of the garrets of Bedminster had long ago in its longest compartment contained goose-quill pens, and brushes made of the hair of the domestic cat; that the caked colors in the small bottles had been the home-mixed inks and paints of the master once liquefied in whisky, and that the varnish was composed of the gum of the cherry tree diluted in water.

Working with these primitive tools, often lit at his task, let us suppose, by the once familiar boat-shaped lard lamps suspended upon trammels of wood, the pioneer schoolmaster at the log school-houses produced in the latter part of the last century and the

beginning of this, the beautiful illuminated hymns (see Plate V) and ornate title-pages which when found in numbers among Mennonites in central Bucks county astonished and delighted us for the first time in August, 1897.¹

These glowing relics of the venerable stone farmhouses of eastern Pennsylvania, sometimes falling to pieces through carelessness, sometimes preserved with veneration between the leaves of large Lutheran Bibles, revealed by degrees to our investigation the following facts:

First, That the art of Fraktur was not confined to Bucks county or to the Mennonites, who had presented us with the first specimens seen, but that it had flourished throughout Pennsylvanian Germany, among the Dunkers, the Schwenkfelders and probably the Amish and Moravians.

Second, That it had been chiefly perpetuated by deliberate instruction in German schools by German schoolmasters, and that it had received its death blow at the disestablishment of the latter in Bucks county in 1854.

Third, That the art, always religious, had not been used for the decoration of secular themes, such as songs, ballads or rhymes, but had expressed itself in

A. ILLUMINATED SONG BOOKS,

Such as the beautiful manuscript song books called *Zionitischer Rosen Garten*, and *Paradisisches Wunder-Spiel*, made by the monks at Ephrata, and presented by Mr. Abram H. Cassell to the Pennsylvania Historical Society.

B. THE TITLE-PAGES TO SMALL, PLAIN MANUSCRIPT MENNONITE SONG BOOKS,

Often giving the owner's name, with the date and the writer's school, with illuminated borderings, overhanging tulips or lotus, birds and angels blowing trumpets. For example:

¹ The observation was made while my *Tools of the Nationmaker* was in press, on August 20, 1897. I called attention to the special discoveries made in Bucks county in *Science* (See *Survival of the Art of Illuminating Manuscripts among the Germans in Eastern Pennsylvania*, September 17, 1897), at a special meeting of the Bucks County Historical Society at Doylestown, October 7, 1897, and in *Tools of the Nationmaker*, published by the Bucks County Historical Society, Alfred Paschall, Doylestown, 1897, under the numbers 103, 633, 689, 726.

1. Leaflet $8\frac{1}{4}$ inches long by $6\frac{3}{4}$ inches broad. Name. Words, *Dieses Vorschefften Buchlein Gehoret Margretha Wismerin Schreiber Schuler in der Birschenheher Schule* (now Blooming Glen). *Vorgeschrieben der October 4te, 1781*. Above a short prayer, surrounded with admonitions to diligence. In rectangle, formed of ornate foliated borders, are three feathered crowns and two angels holding tulips and blowing trumpets. Tulip stalks spring from hearts. Colors, blue, green, red, yellow and black. Probably made in the last century by Jacob Overholt, teacher in a log schoolhouse near Deep Run, Bucks county, Pa. Presented to the writer by his descendant, David Landis, of Plumsteadville.

2. Title-page to church song book (*Lieder Buch*, printed in Germantown, Michael Villmeyer, 1811). Name, Susanna Fretz, upon heart, from which springs a tree with the conventional tulips. Deep beaded bordering, 1814. Colors, red, yellow, brown and black, red predominant.

3. Title-page to manuscript song book. Name, Susanna Fretz (spelled *Fretzin* for feminine) in red circle, with date, 1810. Stalks, with black leaves and conventional tulip to right and left. Foliated border with red leaves on black and yellow ground.

4. Illuminated card on blank page of same hymn book. Above name, Susanna Fretzin, heart, from which rises conventional tulip. In possession of Henry W. Gross, Doylestown.

5. Title-page to manuscript hymn book. Name, Joseph Gross; illuminated letters, foliated capitals. Date, April 20, 1830. Double tulips in foliate border on yellow ground.

6. Title-page to manuscript hymn book. Name, Sarah Wismer. Foliated capitals, conventional flowers on heavy stalks. Date, 1827. Colors, yellow, red, brown and blue.

7. Title-page to ditto. Name, Elizabeth Nesch, spelled *Neschin*; with words, *Dieses Sing-Noten Buchlein Gehoret Mir. Sing Schuler in der Bedminster Schule. Geschrieben, September 6ten, im Jahr, 1799*. Three tulips. In possession of Joseph N. Gross, Doylestown.

8. Title-page to similar book, with tulips floriated capitals, and name, Stauffer. In possession of Isaac J. Stover, of New Britain.

C. REWARDS OF MERIT ON LOOSE LEAFLETS.

About a Foot Long by Eight Inches Broad.

First there is a text of Scripture, with elaborately illuminated characters, and done in many colored inks, under which a bar of music may set the tune to a German hymn, engrossed in many verses below. From this rich, floriated text, with its adorned and highly colored borderings, emerge birds, twining stalks growing from symbolic hearts bearing tulips, or angels blowing trumpets. Examples are :

1. Leaflet, $13\frac{1}{4}$ inches long by $8\frac{3}{8}$ inches wide, with floriated text, *Allda Kreuzigten Sie Ihn.*, etc., etc., nineteenth chapter of John, eighteenth verse,

Luther's translation (see Plate V). Above, single bar of music, with red lines heading hymn and six verses beginning, *O fröhliche Stunden, O herrliche Zeit*. Under this the alphabet in common German handwriting, capitals and small letters, with Arabic numerals up to a hundred. Below, to the left, transverse rhymed admonition in red and black ink, beginning *Ach lieber Mensch*. Two birds are set upon the text of the hymn. The capital letters are elaborately illuminated and surrounded with scrolls. The bordering to the left is colored with a design. In the possession of Henry W. Gross, Doylestown. Date probably from 1760 to 1790.

2. Similar leaflet. Text, one hundred and third Psalm, verses nine and thirteen, in German. Hymn and six verses. Alphabets, numerals and admonition arranged as before. Elaborately illuminated capitals and colored borderings, birds, scrolls and tulips. Colors, red, brown, blue, green yellow and black. Name Christian Gross, in rectangle. Date probably about 1760. In possession of Isaac Gross, of Bedminster.

3, 4. Two similar leaflets, closely resembling each other. Text, Philippians i. 23. Hymn in five verses. Admonition, alphabets and numerals omitted. Capitals more elaborately floriated than before. Conventional leaves, flowers, tulips and birds. Colors, red, blue, green, yellow and black. Ornate borderings with heart pattern. Name, Isaac Gross, on corner of one specimen. Made by Isaac Gross, of Bedminster, related to the owner, born 1807, died 1895. Date about 1840, or earlier. In the possession of Henry K. Gross, of Plumsteadville.

5. Leaflet, slightly smaller (see Plate VII), with hymn or sacred verse in six rhymed lines, beginning *Jesus soll mein Jesus bleiben*, intertwined with numerous leaves bearing flowers. Elaborately scrolled capitals and four birds over the name of the maker, Isaac Gross, January 10, 1830. Colors, green, red, brown, blue and black. In possession of Henry K. Gross, of Plumsteadville.

6. Leaflet, $11\frac{3}{4}$ inches long by $7\frac{3}{4}$ inches broad. Text, Proverbs xiii. 7. Below this, a prayer on the theme of poverty. Capitals set in rectangles filled with pen hatchings. Colors, red and black, with a little green. Date about 1760 or earlier. In possession (1897) of Isaac Gross, of Bedminster.

7. Leaflet, 13 inches long by 8 inches wide. Pious rhyme of admonition to children, beginning *Die Kinder Lieb ist Wunderlich*, with elaborately illuminated capitals, scrolls, leaves, a bird and several tulips. A separate admonition in small ovate enclosure to the right, colored borders with alphabet below. Colors, blue, red, yellow, green, brown and black. In possession of John Walters Chalfont.

D. BOOK MARKS.

Sometimes consisting of such designs as tulips springing from hearts, conventionalized trees, or religious symbols. Examples are :

1. Leaflet, $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches long by $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches wide. Two conventional trees with red stalks, and lanceolate green leaves. Border, yellow and red. No writing. In possession of Henry K. Gross, Plumsteadville. Date, about 1830.

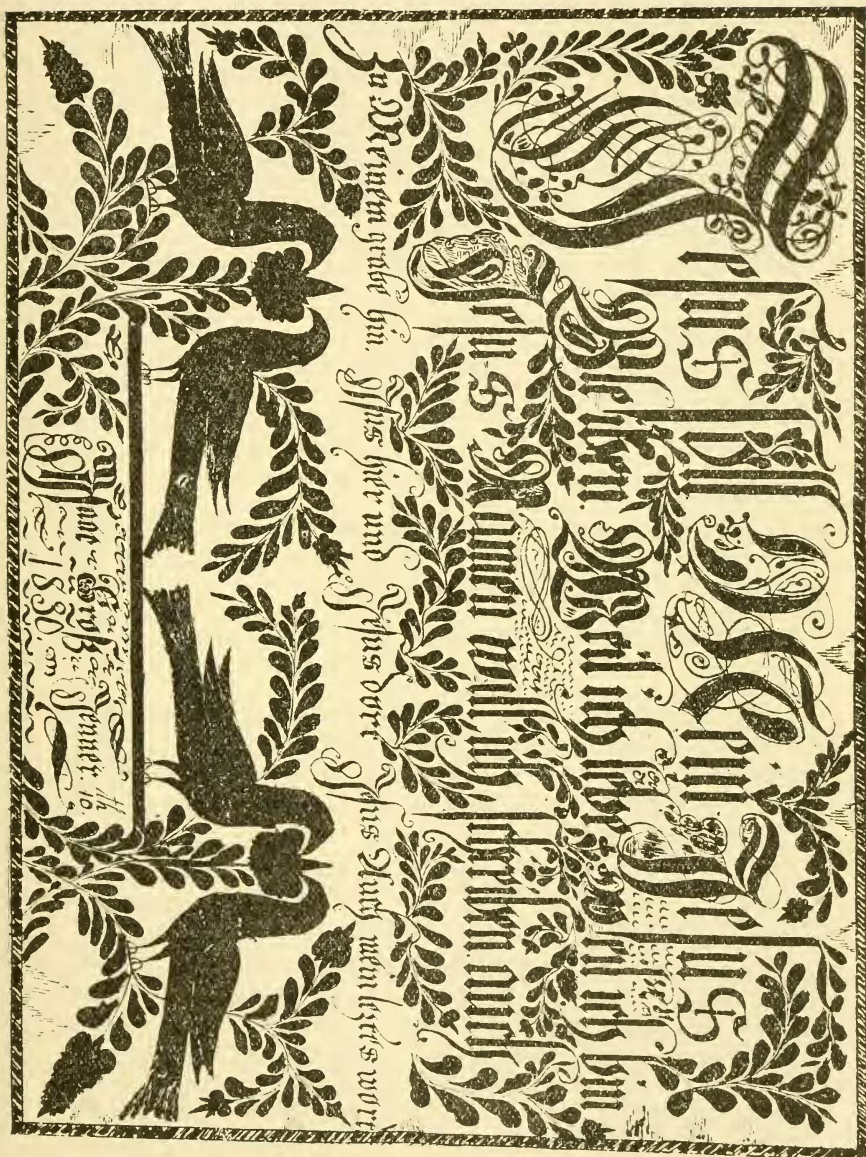


Plate VII. Illuminated leaflet with hymn, and date, 1830. In possession of Henry K. Gross, of Plumsteadville.

2. Conventional bird, the pelican (a mediæval church symbol emblematic of the Redemption), standing upon bracket protruding from urn-shaped nest, tears its breast with its beak (see Plate VIII). Three dotted red lines lead from the wound to the outstretched mouths of three eel-shaped young birds uplifting their bodies from the nest. Colors, red, yellow, green and black. No writing. In possession of Henry K. Gross, of Plumsteadville. Date, about 1830.

3. Leaflet, $7\frac{7}{8}$ inches long by $6\frac{1}{4}$ inches broad. No writing. Two tulips with other flowers sprout from heavy red stalks. Illuminated borders. Colors, red, yellow, brown, green, blue and black. Date, 1820. Made by Isaac Gross, died 1895. In possession of Henry K. Gross, of Plumsteadville.

4. Small leaflet, 4 inches long by 2 inches wide. Stalk bearing large tulip. Flower rises from centre of the heart. Name, Susanna Fretzin. Illuminated border. Colors, red, green, yellow, brown and black. Date probably about 1810. Property of Henry W. Gross, of Doylestown.

5. Unfinished leaflet, 7 inches long by $4\frac{5}{8}$ inches wide. Words, *Diese Bibel ist gekauft worden im Jahr unsers Herrn 1830, den 25th December und gehoret mir, Isaac Gross, \$10.* Abundant leafage springing from a heart with flowers and tulips done in red outline. Brush work just begun. Ornamental borderings. Colors, blue, black, yellow, red and olive. In possession of Henry K. Gross, Plumsteadville.

6. Leaflet, about 9 inches long by $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches broad, with angels and illuminated writing done by teacher of Pebble Hill German School about 1800. In possession of Mrs. Levi Garner, Doylestown.

E. TAUFSCHNEINE OR BAPTISMAL CERTIFICATES WITH MARRIAGE AND DEATH REGISTERS IN BIBLES.

The German custom of preserving baptismal certificates, though wanting the force of legal compulsion, after crossing the Atlantic, survived until recent years in parts of Pennsylvanian Germany. Not practiced by the Mennonites, owing to their rejection of the doctrine of infant baptism, it prevailed extensively among Lutherans in northern Bucks and Lehigh counties, where however since about 1840 printed *Taufschneine*, gaudily colored, took the place of the old documents illuminated by hand.

Three of the printed certificates (giving the date of the individual's birth on a colored sheet adorned with hearts, wreaths, four birds, and angels blowing cornets, published by Johann Ritter, Reading, 1845, and in Allentown in 1848) were seen by the writer in October, 1897, in possession of Philip Flores, of Dillingersville, Lehigh county.

Examples of the old illuminated *Taufschneine* are :

1. Round leaflet, $7\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter, surrounded by a round band, spotted in red, the latter fringed on both sides with yellow and red scrolls. Text, in black, *Anna Maria ist von christliche Lutherische Eltern im Jahr Unsers*

Herrn Jesu Christi 1782 den 30. Jenner in Grossschwam Taunship, Bucks Counti, Geboren, etc., giving name of minister, father, mother and witnesses. Presented by Mr. S. W. Boyer, of Spinnerstown, to the Bucks County Historical Society.

2. Leaflet, 15 inches long by 12½ broad. Text in scalloped circle inscribed with legend, *Wer da glaubt und getauft wird, der wird selig werden. Wer ihn nicht glaubt der wird verdamet werden.* The border is adorned with two large flower stalks, a singing bird and a swan, and two gaudy flying female figures with puffed hair and rosy cheeks, bearing flowers. Another singing bird adorns a small circlet, and upon a heart is inscribed the motto, *Dis Herz mein soll dir allein O lieber Jesu sein.* The baptismal inscription is in plain black Gothic text, *Diese beide Ehegatten als Johannes Erdman und Seine Ehefrau Sara, Eine Geborene Pitzin, Lutherische Religion, ist Einen Sohn Zur Welt Geboren als Heinrich, ist Geboren im Jahr Unseres Herrn Jesu Christi 1792 d. 29. Jany um 6 Uhr Abends in Saccon Taunship Northhampton Counti im Staat Pensylvanien*, giving name of pastor and of witnesses. Colors red, brown, green and yellow. In possession of the Bucks County Historical Society. Given by Oliver H. Erdman, Steinsburg, Bucks county, Pennsylvania.

3 and 4. Two leaflets in style like the above. Certificates of Peter Floers, 1792, and Elizabeth Wetzel, 1804. Flying woman, birds, swans and hearts, floridly executed as above. On one of the hearts is the legend, *Dis Herz mein soll dir allein O lieber Jesu sein.* In possession of Philip Flores, Dillingsville.

5. Leaflet about 15 inches long by 12 wide, containing text in an ornamented square, with heavy border adorned with conventional flowers and tulips, and four hearts containing legends (see Plate IX). Colors brown, red, yellow, green and blue. A certificate in black German Gothic text, translated, says that "Samuel Roeder was born of Christian and married parents in Herford township, Berks county, in Pennsylvania, on May 8, in the year 1779, and was given his Christian name by the minister, Theobold Sahwer, in the Christian Church in Nugoschenhoben," giving witnesses, etc. Deposited in the Museum of the Bucks County Historical Society by Nathan Roeder, of Spinnerstown, Bucks county, Pennsylvania.

The marriage and death registers in Bibles are plainly executed as compared with the other specimens, and it seems that the practice of engrossing these latter lasted much later than the other phases of the art, and still continues (1897) among German families in upper Bucks county. More than two colors, red or purple and black, are rarely used. The elaborate scrolling, the leaves, hearts, birds and tulips, have disappeared. Examples are:

1. Register bound in Lutheran Bible of Mrs. Levi Garner, of Doylestown.
2. Similar register, in purple ink, made about 1890, in Bible of Mr. Elmer E. Funk, of Doylestown.
3. Loose register from Bible of the Hendricks' family near Perkasio, showing late survival of the tulip design. Words, *Sarah Hendricks ist geboren den iten September im Jahr 1851.* Capitals decorated in inferior style with leaves and

three tulips. Colors, very little red, blue and yellow. Probably made in Bedminster. In possession of J. Freeman Hendricks, Doylestown.

It appeared upon inquiry that the art of *Fraktur* was easily traceable to Germany, where, according to information received from foreign-born citizens of the United States living in Philadelphia and Bucks county, it had been taught without religious significance (generally in black, rarely in colors, save to special scholars, and sometimes, if desired, in Nassau with the reed pen of the monks), until about the year 1850, at public schools in Saxony, Bavaria, Hanover, Hesse and Nassau.

If the existence of *Fraktur* in Pennsylvania had been adequately noticed before, its evidences are so interesting that it might well be described again, but we learn that it has been little more than casually alluded to by any writer. Yet it illustrates the relation of Germany to the United States at one of its most interesting points. It recalls the fact that while the English reformation was hostile to artistic impulses, the German reformers were not always unfriendly to them. In this case, at least, they held fast to one of the most beautiful products of mediæval fancy. Here is a contribution to American character at the beginning, for which we owe nothing to New England and the Puritans. *Fraktur* did not come over in the *Mayflower*, nor did it flourish among the associates of those New England reformers who, at the siege of Louisburg, are said to have attacked the adornments of the captured cathedral with axes. As in the case of the Pennsylvanian earthenware of the last century, glazed in several colors and decorated with tulips or the lotus; as with the Durham stove plates of 1750, adorned by Germans with flaming hearts, tulips and designs of Adam and Eve, Potiphar's wife, and the Dance of Death, we see that we are dealing with a reflection of the artistic instinct of the Middle Ages, directed upon us from the valley of the Rhine. The fresher from Germany the better the work. But by degrees the iron caster forgets his trans-Atlantic inheritance of taste. A lack of skill finally overtakes the potter after years spent under sterner and more material conditions. First, the German mottoes are abandoned upon the plate and jar. By degrees the colors grow less varied and the designs weaker. Then the toys and whistles in the shape of birds, fish and animals, are forgotten with recipes for glaze. At last only the yellow tints of the pie-dish remain. So, too, the hand of the master

of Fraktur looses its cunning and the fading art ceases to exist in the memory of a generation yet living.

The establishment of the English school system in Bucks county in 1854¹ necessarily resulted in the suppression of the previously existing German schools. Hence that date after which the latter, sustained by private subscription, lingered on for a time, reasonably marks the end of Fraktur in a region where at least two aged masters of the craft still survive in the person of Jacob Gross, of New Britain, and John H. Detweiler, of Perkasio.

A study of these fugitive examples of a venerated handwriting leads the investigator by sure steps from the Germany of Pennsylvania to the valley of the Rhine, from the backwoods schoolhouse to the mediæval cloister. In the fading leaflets we recognize prototypes of the glowing hand-made volumes that illuminated learning in the Middle Ages and still glorify the libraries of the Old World. From the paint-box of Bedminster to the priceless book which at Venice is shown to the delighted visitor as the handiwork of Hans Memling, we are led by a chain of intimately related facts. With strange sensations, we rescue from the Pennsylvanian garret evidence indisputable of the passing away in the New World of one of the fairest arts of the cloister, which, meeting its death-blow at the invention of printing, crossed the Atlantic to linger among the pious descendants of the German reformers until recent years.

Stated Meeting, October 1, 1897.

Mr. INGHAM in the Chair.

Present, 11 members.

Donations to the Library and Cabinet were reported, and thanks were ordered for them.

¹ A German school sustained by a private subscription was taught by the Mennonite Samuel Musselman, in Swartley's schoolhouse, at the lower end of Hilltown, Bucks county, Pa., about 1866. Information of Mr. J. F. Hendricks Doylestown. Another, the last in Bucks county, existed, under the tuition of Mr. Meyers, of Deep Run, at the old Mennonite Schoolhouse near the meeting house at Deep Run, Bucks county, Pa., in the winters of 1895-96 and 1896-97. At the latter school where a pair of the time-honored leathern spectacles (*Bocksbrille* or *Schulbrille*) now in possession of the Bucks County Historical Society, were used to punish children in 1897, the ceiling rafters are still inscribed with bars of music written in chalk.